



FOR IMMEDIATE

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**STATEMENT OF U.S. SENATOR OLYMPIA J. SNOWE  
ON REAUTHORIZATION OF THE MAGNUSON-STEVENSON  
FISHERY CONSERVATION ACT**

PORTLAND, MAINE — Following is the statement of U.S. Senator Olympia J. Snowe (R-Maine), chair of the Senate Commerce Subcommittee on Oceans and Fisheries, prepared for delivery at a hearing on reauthorization of the Magnuson-Stevens Fishery Conservation Act:

“The Magnuson-Stevens Act is the principal federal law governing marine fisheries management, and today, we will continue what is sure to be an exhaustive review of this law and its implementation. There are some very specific and legitimate concerns with the way the law is being implemented. The Sustainable Fisheries Act of 1996 made significant changes to the objectives of the Magnuson-Stevens Act, the most substantial of which was the mandate to halt overfishing and restore fishing stocks. How that mandate has been implemented is a topic of great concern for a variety of different groups -- *and* to me.

“As we make this assessment, we must naturally look at the activities of the regional councils and NMFS - those entities that carry out the law. Our witnesses today, including Maine representatives on the New England Council, will be able to give first-hand reports about the level of success the Council has had in fulfilling this challenge.

“When the last reauthorization was written, one of the goals was to determine the appropriate level of catch to maximize the benefit to the nation, while at the same time protecting the long-term sustainability of the fisheries. Needless to say, this is a delicate balancing act at best, one that must take into account the competing interests of commercial and recreational fishermen and others who wish to conserve our marine resources.

“Knowing that management measures would be necessary in a variety of fisheries, the councils and NMFS were also told to increase their emphasis on ways to sustain traditional small-scale fishermen. Why? Because just as we preserve the fish, we must also remember to preserve the *fishermen*.

“However, in the years that have followed, there have been numerous criticisms of NMFS and the councils for not taking adequate steps to address the financial hardships that management measures will inevitably cause. Indeed, I have spoken with many of you about the recent actions of the New England Council on groundfish management.

"Time and again I've been told that the Council and NMFS are not listening to your concerns and are not considering the impact impacts these measures have had on fishermen. This forum will provide all of us an opportunity to let NMFS know, firsthand, the kind of impact we've seen on fishermen and fishing communities.

"Minimizing the economic impact of management measures was something that I fought to include as a new National Standard during the last reauthorization, and recognizing this concern, Senator Breaux and I called on the General Accounting Office to investigate this matter.

"The final paradigm shift incorporated in the Sustainable Fisheries Act are the provisions to minimize bycatch and to restore and protect fish habitat. Based on concerns that certain fish stocks had declined due to loss of their surrounding habitat, the Act established a national program to facilitate long-term protection of essential fish habitat. Many have argued that these provisions have not been properly implemented and we will discuss this issue today as well.

"There is no doubt that fisheries are very important to many states and the nation as a whole. In 1998, commercial landings by U.S. fishermen were over 9.2 billion pounds of fish and shellfish, worth \$3.1 billion. Further, the recreational fishing catch was 195 million pounds.

"I'm very proud to say that in 1998, for the fifth year in a row, Maine has lead the Northeast with total fishing revenues valued at \$277.4 million. This is an increase of \$5.1 million from 1997. Over 22,000 men and women in Maine are employed by various fishing industries, and they all deserve to have the fisheries managed well and their livelihoods secure.

"The regional councils were established to allow fisheries management to occur at the local level. This is where tough management decisions need to be made and must involve the people whose daily lives depend on continued access to these resources. Today, we will hear testimony about breakdowns in the public process that have lead to the adoption of less than adequate management measures. We will also have the opportunity to discuss ways to broaden participation in all levels of management, including the science that drives these decisions.

"Under the Magnuson-Stevens Act, we should make sure that sustainable fishing and good management becomes the norm and not the exception. During this reauthorization process we should strive to restore healthy fisheries *and* healthy fishing communities. Clearly, this reauthorization will have major implications for the future of marine fisheries in the United States and this is your chance to have your voice heard.

"Finally, allow me to raise one specific issue that has affected all of us -- the New England Council seat. Frankly, I was shocked when the Secretary of Commerce announced that he had given one of our seats to another state. That this Administration would arbitrarily reduce Maine's representation on the Council at such a critical time flies in the face of reason. Today, I want to assure you that I have made some progress toward correcting that mistake by putting in a bill that passed in the Senate a provision that creates an additional at-large seat on the Council. I will not stop fighting for the representation that Maine so richly deserves."

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